


**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL EFFICACY AND REAL-LIFE NETIZENS  
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (LEBANON- CASE STUDY)**

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p><b>Received</b> 20 February 2023</p> <p><b>Accepted</b> 08 May 2023</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> The objective of this study was to explore netizens' external and internal political efficacy as being exposed to political branding on social media and to show how political branding would level up the citizens' political awareness and boost their participation in voting in the parliamentary election. Lebanon was taken as a case study.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Lebanon; Voter; Netizens; Social Media; Political Branding; Political Efficacy; Political Participation.</p>	<p><b>Theoretical framework:</b> Recent literature has reported the impact of social media political branding on youth participation in voting while other studies have been done separately about the impact of social media political branding on citizens' political efficacy particularly in developed countries. (Binder et al., 2021; Hassan &amp; Ridzuan, 2021; Moorman et al., 2019; Slipetska, 2021; Lau et al., 2021) However, there is still much to investigate about netizens' political efficacy and participation in a developing country like Lebanon.</p>
	<p><b>Methodology:</b> The study used the deductive approach and was based on using of primary statistical data for testing the hypotheses which have been analyzed by SPSS v22. The population, 491 participants, from whom the data was obtained randomly were Lebanese people of age groups over 21 in various provinces.</p>
	<p><b>Findings:</b> Overall, the data reflects a positive correlation of social media impact on voters' political participation, and it implies that the political influence of social media platforms on the self-external and internal efficacy is strong.</p>
	<p><b>Research, Practical &amp; Social Implications:</b> On the Lebanese level, and as the election has been done, it is recommended to measure the youth participation in voting. Also, this study is very beneficial to be used by the governments themselves for fostering the political efficacy of the nations, especially in developing countries.</p>
	<p><b>Originality:</b> This study analyses the role social media does in encouraging citizens' political efficacy and political participation in voting especially after the offensive revolution Lebanese have done pre- election comparing with many previous parliamentary elections in which participation was so shy and didn't exceed 49.70 %. (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 2018)</p>
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**O IMPACTO DA MÍDIA SOCIAL NA EFICÁCIA POLÍTICA E NA PARTICIPAÇÃO POLÍTICA DE  
NETIZENS DA VIDA REAL (LÍBANO- ESTUDO DE CASO)**

**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste estudo foi explorar a eficácia política externa e interna dos internautas ao serem expostos ao branding político nas mídias sociais e mostrar como o branding político aumentaria a consciência

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política dos cidadãos e aumentaria sua participação na votação nas eleições parlamentares. O Líbano foi tomado como estudo de caso.

**Estrutura teórica:** A literatura recente relatou o impacto da marca política da mídia social na participação dos jovens na votação, enquanto outros estudos foram feitos separadamente sobre o impacto da marca política da mídia social na eficácia política dos cidadãos, particularmente nos países desenvolvidos. (Binder et al., 2021; Hassan & Ridzuan, 2021; Moorman et al., 2019; Slipetska, 2021; Lau et al., 2021) No entanto, ainda há muito a investigar sobre a eficácia política e a participação dos internautas em um desenvolvimento país como o Líbano.

**Metodologia:** O estudo utilizou a abordagem dedutiva e baseou-se no uso de dados estatísticos primários para testar as hipóteses que foram analisadas pelo SPSS v22. A população, 491 participantes, da qual os dados foram obtidos aleatoriamente, eram libaneses de faixas etárias acima de 21 anos em várias províncias.

**Resultados:** No geral, os dados refletem uma correlação positiva do impacto da mídia social na participação política dos eleitores, e isso implica que a influência política das plataformas de mídia social na auto-eficácia externa e interna é forte.

**Implicações de Pesquisa, Práticas e Sociais:** No nível libanês, e conforme a eleição foi feita, recomenda-se medir a participação dos jovens na votação. Além disso, este estudo é muito benéfico para ser usado pelos próprios governos para promover a eficácia política das nações, especialmente nos países em desenvolvimento.

**Originalidade:** Este estudo analisa o papel que a mídia social desempenha no incentivo à eficácia política e à participação política dos cidadãos no voto, especialmente após a revolução ofensiva que os libaneses fizeram antes das eleições, comparando com muitas eleições parlamentares anteriores nas quais a participação foi tão tímida e não ultrapassou 49,70 %. (Ministério do Interior e Municípios, 2018)

**Palavras-chave:** Líbano, Eleitor, Internautas, Mídia Social, Branding Político, Eficácia Política, Participação Política.

## EL IMPACTO DE LAS REDES SOCIALES EN LA EFICACIA POLÍTICA Y LA PARTICIPACIÓN POLÍTICA DE LOS INTERNETIZANTES DE LA VIDA REAL (LÍBANO - ESTUDIO DE CASO)

### RESUMEN

**Propósito:** El objetivo de este estudio fue explorar la efectividad política nacional e internacional de los usuarios de Internet cuando se exponen a la marca política en las redes sociales y mostrar cómo la marca política aumentaría la conciencia política de los ciudadanos y aumentaría su participación electoral en las elecciones parlamentarias. El Líbano se tomó como caso de estudio.

**Marco teórico:** la literatura reciente ha informado sobre el impacto de la marca política en las redes sociales en la participación de los jóvenes en las votaciones, mientras que otros estudios se han realizado por separado sobre el impacto de la marca política en las redes sociales en la eficacia política de los ciudadanos, particularmente en los países desarrollados. (Binder et al., 2021; Hassan & Ridzuan, 2021; Moorman et al., 2019; Slipetska, 2021; Lau et al., 2021) Sin embargo, aún queda mucho por investigar sobre la efectividad política y la participación de los usuarios de Internet en un país en desarrollo como el Líbano.

**Metodología:** El estudio utilizó el enfoque deductivo y se basó en el uso de datos estadísticos primarios para probar las hipótesis que fueron analizadas por SPSS v22. La población, 491 participantes, de la que se obtuvieron datos aleatoriamente, eran libaneses de 21 años o más en varias provincias.

**Resultados:** En general, los datos reflejan una correlación positiva del impacto de las redes sociales en la participación política de los votantes, y esto implica que la influencia política de las plataformas de redes sociales en la autoeficacia externa e interna es fuerte.

**Implicaciones sociales, prácticas y de investigación:** A nivel libanés, y tal como se llevó a cabo la elección, se recomienda medir la participación de los jóvenes en la votación. Además, este estudio es muy beneficioso para ser utilizado por los propios gobiernos para promover la eficacia política de las naciones, especialmente en los países en desarrollo.

**Originalidad:** Este estudio analiza el papel que juegan las redes sociales en el fomento de la eficacia política y la participación política de los ciudadanos en las votaciones, especialmente después de la revolución ofensiva que los libaneses hicieron antes de las elecciones, en comparación con muchas elecciones parlamentarias anteriores en las que la participación fue tan tímida y no no supere el 49,70%. (Ministerio del Interior y Municípios, 2018)

**Palabras clave:** Líbano, Votantes, Usuarios de Internet, Redes Sociales, Branding Político, Eficacia Política, Participación Política.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the revolution of the 17th November of 2019 in Lebanon, the public opinion, which has been significantly aroused through social media and manipulated through the same means as well, can no more be neglected or underestimated. Since then, most of the Lebanese, educated or illiterate, knowledgeable in politics, finance and economics or unknowledgeable, acclaim through social media some terminologies and slogans they don't understand. Le Bon (1895), in his book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, emphasizes that the crowd is always dominated by unconscious considerations - the absence of brain activity, the weakening of intelligence and the complete transformation of emotions, so they would be instantly heroic and criminal. Social media nowadays is mastering this role as people are attached to it as well as they have become politically interactive. Also, the statistical reports about social media usage in Lebanon (Hootsuite, 2021) show that while population in Lebanon is 6.80 million and only 70.3 % of them is over 18 years old, the internet users percentage is 5.3 million- 4.37 million of them (64.3% of the total population) use social media.

In this year of financial meltdown, the Lebanese election political branding had no other choice rather than using social media in a time the cost of papers, printing, billboards, and TV interviews was dollarized; in other words, incredibly expensive especially to the civil society new candidates, so this led to a transfer in the usage of the branding budgets toward social media advertising campaigns and benzene coupons for voters in the election day. And according to one of the recent reports of the European Union (2022), the electoral preparations were hampered by scarce financial and personnel resources, and the voters were overshadowed by widespread instances of clientelism and vote-buying, which gravely harmed voter choice and altered the playing field. Also, the political electoral campaigns were active but were hampered by numerous intimidation incidents, some of which took place on social media. Common information manipulation also corrupted the internet environment. Thus, they concluded that the ability to vote is still severely restricted for a number of citizenry categories in Lebanon, especially that there are significant problems with openness and accountability in the campaign financing laws. While most people appreciated free speech, it wasn't given equal attention or balanced treatment by the media.

Consequently, political awareness imposed itself among netizens; however, it wasn't an indication or a hope trigger for voters' behavior as much as it was an emotional trigger that was manipulated by the media designers and content writers. When we talk about election, we talk about democracy, about freedom of speech, freedom of wills, and citizens' participation in the

political system building. Nevertheless, the international index of democracy hasn't mentioned Lebanon among the democratic countries (The Economist, 2022); the democracy in Lebanon is abused to be used for the political leaders' personal benefits against citizens' benefits with the complete approval of the citizens themselves.

### **Research Objectives**

This research targets many objectives to investigate which are summarized into two fields of analysis. First, it aims to explore netizens' opinions about how responsive politicians and political processes are (external efficacy) and whether netizens believe, through their being exposed to political branding on social media and their engagement as well, that they are sufficiently skilled to participate in politics (internal efficacy). Second, the research means to show how political branding on social media would level up the citizens' political awareness and boost the public participation in voting in the parliamentary election in Lebanon.

### **Significant of the Study**

Nowadays, social media shapes politics status in Lebanon as a country with a democratic system. It is used to convey particular messages and hit political targets through its effect on the public decision making. Social media penetration has a persuasive effect especially on young and uneducated people who changed their ideas as a result of their exposure to social media. This study is extremely important as it analyses the role social media does in deviating both the public attitudes toward the current ruling system and their voting decision path after many previous parliamentary elections in which participation was 49.70 %. (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 2018)

### **Research Hypotheses**

Based on the questions above, the research hypothesizes the following:

**H1.** Political branding on social media significantly affects the participation in making the political decision through voting.

**H2.** Political branding on social media significantly influences the political efficacy.

**H2a.** Political branding on social media significantly influences the political internal efficacy.

**H2b.** Political branding on social media significantly influences the political external efficacy.

**H3.** The political efficacy affects netizens' participation in politics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Political Branding

Because there is no universal definition of a political brand, it could be generally defined as a political enterprise aimed at projecting a positive picture of the political process and uniting specific target groups. A political brand's subtypes include a brand personality (a politician's image) and a brand organization (party or any other political structure) (Slipetska, 2021). Political image and political reputation are the foundations of a political brand's structure. With the mandatory definition of its cognitive structure, which includes a set of special values, characteristics, signs, expectations, moods, and emotional perception, a political brand allows us to track the process of forming a holistic and fixed image of a political actor in a particular social group (Ciftci, 2021). When discussing a party brand, it's worth noting that in recent years, parties have taken a lot of cues from commercial marketing in order to make their "product" as appealing as possible. Scholars study voter behavior and the elements that impact it in elections (Schneider, 2019; Guntermann&Lachat, 2021; Pellegata& Visconti, 2021). Political advertising, co-branding, and parallel positioning are usually discussed as tools for marketing a party's or candidate's political brand. In the political market, political advertising is the most extensively utilized method of promoting political products. The purpose of political advertising is to familiarize voters with current political proposals, promote political principles and slogans, and encourage individuals to vote. Political advertising use both reasonable and unreasonable (emotional) tactics to persuade voters (Moorman et al., 2019; Slipetska, 2021; Lau et al., 2021).

### Political Overview of the Lebanese Political Branding for the Parliamentary Election 2022

Lebanon is the home of striking polarities & contrasts where citizens blame refusing their politicians who do continuously exclaim their empathy toward the nation. In 2018 parliamentary elections, the statistics of the ministry of Internal Affairs shows that the rate of amounted to only 49.20 percent participated in the voting process (France 24, 2018). This indicates that more than half of the Lebanese didn't participate in defining their political destiny for the coming years even though the election occurred after nine years of political turbulence, 2 years without a president and an extension for the parliament tenure several times. So, it is really completely complicated to expect whether this time would be different, and whether there

will be a realistic participation in the political decision making by the Lebanese, old and new generations, who have witnessed excessive and often fatal force, by security personnel-frequently with political impunity, to quell their protests, the Lebanese whose half of their Beirut city has been devastated and at least 219 people were killed by the catastrophic explosion in Beirut's port on August 4, 2020 while no one has yet been held accountable, the Lebanese whose politicians approved the removal of subsidies on medicine and fuel, and experience the power cut about 23 hours per day, etc... And according to the World bank, as it is stated in the World Report 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2022), Lebanon's financial and economic crisis has been caused by the government's.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation commissioned a report that examines political trends since the 2018 legislative elections on a random sample of 1,200 Lebanese aged 21 and over, representing genders, regions, faiths, socioeconomic classes, and educational levels, mentioning that only half of the respondents believed that the 2022 parliamentary elections could be a source of political change (Hijazi, 2022). Also, the study discovered that 44.8 percent of respondents will not vote for the same party as they did in 2018. In light of the political advertising that had saturated the country on the eve of the Parliamentary elections in 2018, Ibrahim Lahoud, Managing Partner of Beirut-based brand consultancy and strategic design business Brand Tribe, considered that none of the campaigns could have a significant impact on voter turnout and because of the structure of our socio-political fabric, voters are obligated to vote for a pre-selected leader; consequently, the term "sheeple" is extensively used on social media (Lahoud, 2018). And as we saw in 2018, the vast majority of campaigns rely on good design, elegant typography, and current delivery media; in 2022, the same scenes, billboards, conferences, religious onuses and speeches of enticement and intimidation; in addition to social media promotions (ArabAd, 2022).

Obviously, in order to provide unprecedented transparency and control over election and political advertisements, Meta has announced the expansion of its tools and rules to countries around the world, including Lebanon, that have soon elections. In Lebanon, Meta began enforcing a ban on ads related to elections or politics; all advertisements must be authorized and situated in that country in order to protect elections and help avoid meddling (ArabAds, 2022). Surprisingly, while political advertisements play a vital role in every election, Meta has heard from users who want to see fewer of them on their Facebook and Instagram feeds, and it unveiled a new feature earlier this year that gives individuals more control over the advertising they see on Facebook (Meta Business Help Centre, 2022).



Based on a recent study which has been done on investigating about 40 old and new Lebanese political parties social media and their leaders' social media accounts on daily basis between 14 February and 7 March 2022, the analysis of data shows that the traditional sectarian parties and alternative movements have a notable comparative trend: while traditional parties tend to revive a more divided discourse based on the distinction between "us" and "them," and to adopt a more focused stance on this subject, alternative movements generally rely on the idea of "Combating assassinations" as part of broader and more comprehensive ideas related to their overall view of the existing regime and its repressive tools. Alternative parties and movements, in comparison to established sectarian parties, are more focused on all other aspects of the democratic transition and freedom of expression, particularly in terms of their engagement in electoral competition and protests in various locations (Safyedine, 2022). For example, Hezbollah president, Nasrallah, assured in his speech for launching his party election campaign being innocent of Lebanon chaos and its discipline mess by a pretense that there was no possibility to change the system or making a difference from within the Parliament as its amending the constitution requires two thirds, complex and difficult mechanisms, and then it could be challenged and canceled by the Constitutional Council (Alkodoss, 2022).

Browsing different websites of various Lebanese political parties seeking their electoral programs 2022, all programs include same general titles like sovereignty, democracy, economy, society, environment, etc. None of them includes SMART objectives (The Lebanese Kataeb, 2022; AlManar, 2022; Citizens in a State, 2022; Meanwhile, the new political parties have no websites and it was so hard to follow their detailed electoral programs; the only means through which they use to promote themselves was the social media as shy usage of billboards on streets for political branding purposes due to the dollarization crisis in Lebanon.

Comparing same old political parties' electoral programs of 2018 and their new ones, which are still available on the same websites, none of what they promised to do have been fulfilled, but matters got worse in Lebanon.

### **Social Media and Political Decision Making**

Young people consider the Internet as a flexible medium for information seeking (Kim & Ellison, 2021), getting political news updates, online political messaging for opinion expression, and political expression (Saleem et al., 2021). According to (Heiss, 2021), social media can help new voters decide whether or not to vote in the general election. (Kim, 2021), on the other hand, emphasizes that increased exposure to bad political topics or media

dissatisfaction might alter participants' cynicism, and that political apathy leads to lesser political involvement among young people, and it may also have an impact on various levels of political participation, whether active or passive.

According to (Fucks, 2021), social media has a substantial impact on people's voting behavior in major and semi-urban locations. Through the employment of appealing adverts, social media plays an important role in the voting behavior of young voters, particularly among students. It has the ability to not only catch people's attention, but also to influence their voting behavior. The research also discovered that people who utilize social media frequently make decisions depending on the political content they read. Social media enhances public awareness and acts as a motivator for people to vote and turn out (Priyanto et al., 2021).

According to (Fujiwara et al, 2022), social media has a significant impact on voter turnout in elections. Facebook has been discovered to be a digital platform with a significant level of political sentiment among its users. This is because to its feature that allows users to comment on each other's status, audio, and graphics. They can also communicate and participate in the current public debate environment. Furthermore, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have a significant role in student political conduct (Priyanto et al., 2021). Plus, the decision to vote in an election is one of the most understandable political behaviors so that the importance of people's issues like as growing prices of products and gasoline, corruption, and the marketability of graduates' influence voting behavior (Hamedan et al., 2019).

### **Political Efficacy**

Political efficacy is defined as "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell et al., 1954). It is defined as citizens' confidence that they can comprehend and influence political matters, as well as their trust in their potential to change the government (Hassan & Ridzuan, 2021).

Because of the concept's theoretical relevance, measuring political efficacy is important: an efficacious citizenry is more likely to impose legitimacy on political systems and avoid the forms of disenchantment that lead to democratic and participatory decline, as well as worse consequences like illicit political participation or violent revolutionary movements (Scotto et al., 2021). There are two types of political efficacy:



**a. Internal Political Efficacy:** it is derived from political knowledge and impacts a variety of political engagement behaviors. It justifies political participation when a person acquires knowledge about political issues on a regular basis, influencing participation in voting. The more political participation a person has, the better their self-efficacy. Internal efficacy has been used to explain political participation in a variety of ways while self-efficacy and involvement of citizens were found to predict trust in the government and parliament, as well as contentment with democracy (Prats & Meunier 2021). According to new studies, (Gastil et al., 2017; Knobloch et al., 2019) found that voters who were better informed about the assemblies' design were more likely to vote in accordance with their recommendations, implying that understanding the process gave voters confidence in their fellow citizens' decision-making abilities.

**b. External Political Efficacy:** external political effectiveness refers to how much a person believes he or she can influence the political process and how receptive political systems are to their requests (Geurkink et al., 2020). External efficacy is the notion that government officials listen to the public and that there are legal means to influence decisions made by the government (Priyanto et al., 2021).

Deliberative participation has been shown to increase external efficacy, as participants begin to believe that they can influence policy decisions, and that these beliefs are a motivating factor for citizen participation in politics (Boulianne, 2018) It is critical to note that external political efficacy does not (necessarily) refer to a person's ability (i.e. internal political efficacy). Rather, it refers to people's impressions of how open institutions are to individual requests. Furthermore, despite the fact that the two are sometimes confused, external political efficacy and political trust are fundamentally distinct (Gil de Zúñiga et al, 2012)

Therefore, the link between internal and external political effectiveness is often weak because these two components of political efficacy have different referents: oneself (in the case of internal political efficacy) and politicians and political institutions (in the case of external political efficacy). Internal and external political efficacy are positively associated in democratic conditions (Muller, 1970; Craig, 1979; Niemi et al., 1991; Morrell, 2003), but they are mostly independent in authoritarian regimes.

Exterior correlates of internal and external political efficacy exhibit various patterns of connection (potential causes or effects). On the one hand, participation in campaign and community-oriented activities is strongly linked to internal political efficacy (Craig, 1979; Niemi et al., 1991; Morrell, 2003). (Positive attitudes toward) political protest are also

associated with high internal political efficacy (Serek et al., 2017). As a result, interactive experiences appear to improve people's perceptions of their political efficacy (Serek et al., 2017). Furthermore, higher levels of educational achievement, social standing, personal interest, political vigilance, and political knowledge contribute to stronger convictions of internal political efficacy (Morrell, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991). Personality is also linked to internal political efficacy: People with a high level of Openness are more likely to be critical thinkers, whereas people with high Extraversion tend to be dominant, aggressive, and persuasive.

### **Political Efficacy and Media**

The findings demonstrated that political message propagation on social media has a favorable and significant association with young voters' political participation, political awareness, and political efficacy. Overall, the data suggested that the usage of social media could improve political engagement, particularly among young voters (Gogoi, 2020; Dankwah et al, 2021). Online political efficacy is proposed as a mechanism relating social media use and political participation in this article. We argue that (1) the effect of information-oriented social media use on political involvement is positively mediated by the user's online political efficacy, and (2) this mediation effect is only significant for online political participation. (Bandura, 1986; Chadwick, 2006; Halpern et al, 2017; Chen et al, 2019) Political efficacy had no effect on offline political participation and was not found to be a mediator between online and offline political participation (Tariq et al, 2022).

### **Related Previous Studies**

The Internet and social media have created forums for people to discuss politics via online groups, pages, and accounts. Karakaya and Glazier (2019) emphasized the relevance of new media in providing a platform for political participation, and Jamil (2018) found that social media users represent active policy dialogue and involvement. Additionally, Chae, Lee, and Kim (2019) and their study looked at the influence of the Internet on people's political participation, paying particular attention to how the Internet shapes people's perceptions of politics. Alarqan (2021) also did a study looking into the connections between social media, political efficacy, and political involvement at Jordan's Al al-Bayt University. The significance of social media in influencing political efficacy and participation, as well as the function of political engagement in influencing political efficacy, is supported by empirical evidence.

Online petitions and commenting on politicians' tweets are only two examples of completely new types of action and connection that social media has given rise to (Sloam 2014). Young adults frequently seek non-institutionalized and horizontal modes of participation, which social networks provide (Sloam, 2014). Such political participation is only possible via social media; hence it must be considered a different sub dimension of political participation. In general, the various kinds of participation can be divided into institutionalized (such as voting) and non-institutionalized categories (e.g., protest behavior). People are disproportionately more likely to participate through non-institutionalized means, so this distinction is important, in particular in the internet environment (Weiss, 2020). According to Quintelier (2007), "in practically every election, young people are the least likely to vote, and their participation percentages are steadily dropping." Scholars have lamented a participation gap between younger and older people for decades (Quintelier, 2007). For instance, despite the fact that young people in Austria can vote at age 16, their turnout is still fairly low (Binder et al., 2021). Findings from other nations likewise imply that young people have poor political trust and rather negative attitudes of politics (Quintelier, 2007; Binder et al., 2021).

The claim is that for those who are not particularly engaged in institutional politics, digital media is a significant information source. More precisely, it is commonly believed that social media encourages people to participate in politics since its networking features aid in the development of traits in people's minds that encourage offline participation (Kahne and Boyer, 2018). Additionally, a landmark cross-sectional study by Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012) contends that social media indirectly encourage involvement by promoting opinion expression, a major factor in political participation. It has been proposed that news sharing on social media, for instance, might make social bonds stronger and boost social cohesiveness, which in turn, can have a positive indirect effect on political engagement. It has been asserted that news sharing on social media platforms, among other forms of social media use, can strengthen social ties and boost social cohesion, which in turn may be the catalyst for group engagement and collective action. This is yet another indirect impact of social media on political participation (e.g., Goh et al., 2019; Hwang and Kim, 2015). Social media also has an impact on civic attitudes, and this is because it helps people understand society as a building of human actors with political and moral purposes (Chen et al., 2015). Additionally, it has been proposed that social media encourages unintentional exposure to political information, which has learning consequences and, in turn, increases participation in traditional political activities (Matthes et al., 2020). Additionally, Boukes (2019) argues that social media expands people' learning

prospects since "never before has so much knowledge, generally without additional financial expenditures, been so close at hand for citizens" (p. 39). According to this claim, the timeline structure of social networking sites might result in a "by-product" learning mechanism that reduces knowledge gaps and, eventually, promotes political engagement (Chadwick, 2012).

Although empirical results are inconclusive, research appears to support the assumption that voters for populist parties are more likely to have low levels of external political efficacy. For instance, Rooduijn et al. (2016) show that people who believe they have less control over the political process are more likely to support a left- or right-wing populist party (together with supply side issues). According to Van der Kolk (2018), supporters of right-wing populist parties do not exhibit lower levels of external political efficacy than supporters of left-wing populist parties.

Previous research on how political deliberation affects participants' internal and external efficacy has produced mixed results. Grönlund, Setälä, and Herne (2010), Nabatchi (2010), Ergenc (2014), Knobloch and Gastil (2015), Boulianne (2019) are only a few research that have discovered political deliberation has good impacts that show up as higher levels of efficacy. Some research finds no effects of deliberation on political efficacy (Morrell, 2005; O'Flynn et al., 2019), while others report negative effects (Gastil et al., 2017; Andersen and Hansen, 2007). According to Grönlund et al (2010), participants' external efficacy may rise as a result of their increased awareness of the complexity of political issues and comprehension of the participants and processes in representative democracies. In addition, Setälä (2017) contends that mixed deliberation allows voters a chance to engage with elected officials, which strengthens the process and may boost voters' political effectiveness (Setälä, 2017; Ryan 2014; Geissel and Hess 2017). This could perhaps be because politicians can directly explain things during discussions, at least in theory. On the other side, it is absolutely feasible that conflicting opinions show that politicians fall short of expectations, which can lead to a decrease in their external efficacy.

Additionally, if discussion participants "practice" participating in a political process themselves, their internal political effectiveness may rise (Gastil 2000; Gronlund et al., 2010). This technique may also be particularly important in political discussion since the presence of politicians may make the "practice" much more real and allow voters to realize firsthand how equal they are to politicians. Mutz (2006) contends that being pushed to one's limits or exposed to conflicting viewpoints might make one question their validity.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Approach**

The research Approach refers to the comprehensive plan and procedure that the researcher opts to conduct the research. The research approach is selected by considering the logic, generalization, Use of data, and research theory. There are three types of research approaches; Deductive, Inductive, and Adductive. The present research used the Deductive approach for testing the hypotheses of research as the present study is based on using of Primary statistical data and analyzed by SPSS based on a group of theories. The research findings either verify or falsify the theories; accept or reject the hypotheses targeted in the study.

### **Research Design**

The present study, the data has been gathered using the Quantitative research design. The responses from the respondents have been collected by Online Questionnaire that further analyzed by using the statistical tool available in SPSS v22. Moreover, the present research is descriptive cross-sectional as the data has been collected at one specific point in time.

### **Population and Sample**

The present research is aimed to investigate the impact of social media on political efficacy and real-life netizens political participation in Lebanon. The research population from whom the data was obtained randomly were Lebanese people of age groups over 21 in various provinces who use social media to get and share political information; a pilot study has been done before. The sample size of the present study is  $n=491$ .

### **Instrument**

The survey instruments were adapted from the American National Election Studies (ANES); some questions were close-ended questions while others were structured to be answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. The questionnaire has four components, with the goal of studying structural links between social media usage, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy with the choice to vote among Lebanese voters. The demographic profile of the respondents was presented in Section A. Section B asked respondents to share their personal experiences using social media to learn and improve their awareness about politics, while Section C looked at the political efficacy of

social media on Lebanese voters. The choice to vote among new voters was explored in Section D. Overall, the questionnaire has consisted of 29 questions.

### Procedures

Considering the hectic circumstances of the population of the present study, the researcher collected the data from the n=491 respondents through Google Forms (online). The link of the questionnaire, along with the objectives and significance of the research, have been sent to the population through WhatsApp groups. To check whether the Instrument of the present study is valid and reliable for achieving the research objectives, the Instrument has been presented to ten random respondents. The data gathered from them has been analyzed by conducting the test for validity (Correlation Analysis) and Test for reliability (Cronbach Alpha Value) in SPSS. The results from the 10 questionnaires helped to declare that the questionnaire is reliable and valid for the study.

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Below are the results of the survey which was distributed randomly via different WhatsApp groups in different regions in Lebanon; 491 filled the survey. Hence, 491 Questionnaires were found useable to test the hypotheses of the present study and have been analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 22.

### Demographic of Respondents

This study illustrates the results of the survey in which 491 respondents from different provinces in Lebanon, whose ages were over 21 years old had completed the questionnaires of the survey.

Demographic data was collected despite the fact that these variables weren't one of the study purposes, and the data analysis results show that 59.47 % of the respondents were male whereas the remaining 40.53% were female respondents. Additional demographic data results are shown in table (1).

Table (1) Demographic Variables

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	292	59.47 %
	Female	199	40.53%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>



<b>Age</b>	21 to 30	222	45.2 %
	31 to 40	175	25.6%
	41 to 50	58	11.8%
	51 to 60	25	5.1%
	over 60 years	11	2.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Education</b>	Doctorate/ Master's	243	49.5%
	Bachelor	192	39.1
	High school	47	9.6
	Less than High School	9	1.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Employment</b>	self- employed	90	18.3
	employees	278	56.6
	unemployed	108	22
	Others	15	3.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Province</b>	Beirut	65	13.2
	Mount Lebanon	166	33.8
	North Lebanon	27	5.5
	South Lebanon	64	13
	Nabatieh	108	22
	Bikaa	6.5	6.5
	Balbak-Hermel	25	5.1
	Akkar	4	0.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Belonging to Political Party</b>	I belong to a political party	281	57.2
	I Don't belong to a political party	210	42.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table (2) shows that all the respondents use variety of social media channels while the majority use WhatsApp (98.8%) and Facebook (90.4%). Also, all the respondents are addicted to social media in which 29% of them use it for 2 hours or less and 71% use it between 3 and 5 hours per day. On the other hand, 48.9%, around half of the respondents, use social media for political participation and a bit more than half of the sample don't believe that political social

media posts are related to their needs as citizens to live a decent life and practice their citizenship.

Table (2) Participants Interaction with Social Media &amp; Political Branding

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Social Media Channel</b>	WhatsApp	485	98.8
	Facebook	444	90.4
	Twitter	250	50.9
	Instagram	338	68.8
	LinkedIn	132	26.9
	YouTube	278	56.6
<b>Number of hours spent on social media per day</b>	1 hour	41	8.4
	2 hours	101	20.6
	3 hours	145	29.5
	4 hours	76	15.5
	5 hours	128	26.1
<b>Purpose of Participants' usage of social media</b>	Social relations	368	74.9
	Education	336	68.4
	Political participation	240	48.9
	Others	116	23.6
<b>political social media posts are almost related to my needs as a citizen for to living a decent life and practicing my citizenship</b>	Strongly disagree	167	34
	disagree	107	21.8
	Neutral	124	25.3
	Agree	72	14.7
	Strongly agree	21	4.3

Using the Group statistics in table (3), the result show that 236 out of 491 participants have the willingness to participate in the next voting process; furthermore, using the Independent- Samples Test, the results in the table (4) show that there is a statistical significant difference about the participation since sig = 0.000. Consequently, there is a strong positive linear relationship between the political branding on social media and the participation in voting process (significance = .000 < 0.05). Thus, the hypothesis **H1**, particularly is accepted; political branding on social media significantly affects the participation in making the political decision through voting.

Table (3) Group Statistics of Political Branding on Social Media Usage & Participating in voting  
Group Statistics

	Will you vote in the coming election?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Political Branding	No	255	.0963	.16376	.01287
	Yes	236	.3176	.23978	.01322

Table (4) statistical significant difference between Political Branding on Social Media Usage & Participating in voting  
Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Political Branding	Equal variances assumed	-10.593	489	.000	-.22133	.02090	-.26239	-.18028

Using the One- Sample Test, first, the results in the table (5) show that there is a strong positive linear relationship between the usage of social media and the internal efficacy (significance = .002 < 0.05). Thus, since p- value = .002 < 0.05, we can conclude that there is a significant statistical relationship between the between the usage of social media and the internal efficacy and the hypothesis **H2a**, particularly related to the internal efficacy, is accepted. There is also a weak positive correlation between them since  $r = 0.140 < 0.5$ .

Table (5) Correlation between Social Media Usage &amp; Internal Efficacy

		Social Media Usage	Internal Efficacy
<b>Social Media Usage</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.140**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	491	491
<b>Internal Efficacy</b>	Pearson Correlation	.140**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	491	491

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in the table (5) show that there is a strong positive linear relationship between the usage of social media and the internal efficacy (significance = .006 < 0.05). Thus, since p- value = .006 < 0.05, we can conclude that there is a significant statistical relationship between the between the usage of social media and the external efficacy and the hypothesis **H2b**, particularly related to the external efficacy, is accepted. There is also a **weak positive** correlation between them since  $r = 0.123 < 0.5$ .

Table (6) Correlation between Social Media Usage &amp; External Efficacy

		Social Media usage	External Efficacy
Social Media usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.123**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	491	491
External Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.123**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	491	491

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in the table (7) show that there is a positive linear relationship between the usage of social media and the political efficacy in general (significance = .000 < 0.05). And since  $r = 0.334$ , we can conclude that the correlation between them is moderate positive.

Therefore, all in all, Hypothesis **H2** is verified as accepted with moderate correlation between the usage of social media for political purposes and the political efficacy in general, while it is weak positive correlation with each of the internal and the external efficacy.

Table (7) Correlation between Social Media Usage &amp; Political Efficacy

		Political efficacy	Political branding
Political efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	491	491
Political branding	Pearson Correlation	.334**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	491	491

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (8) Independent Samples Test between gender &amp; political

		t-test for Equality of Means							
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
						Lower	Upper		
Political efficacy	Equal variances assumed	3.499	489	.001	.24989	.07142	.10956	.39022	

Table (9) Anova Significance Test for Gender, Age, Education, Employment, Province &amp; Sects and Political Efficacy

Age	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.584	4	.396	.639	.635
Within Groups	301.003	486	.619		
Total	302.587	490			
Education	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.481	3	.494	.798	.495
Within Groups	301.106	487	.618		
Total	302.587	490			
Employment	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.019	3	1.006	1.636	.180
Within Groups	299.568	487	.615		
Total	302.587	490			
Province	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.226	7	.747	1.213	.294
Within Groups	297.361	483	.616		
Total	302.587	490			
Sects	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.510	7	1.216	1.997	.054
Within Groups	294.077	483	.609		
Total	302.587	490			

The Independent Samples Test in table (8) shows that there is a statistical significant difference between gender and political efficacy since sig = 0.001; however, the Anova test in table (9) shows that there is no statistical significant difference between political efficacy and each of the age, education, employment, province or sects groups with sig = 0.635, 0.495, 0.180, 0.294, 0.054 respectively.

Table (10) Correlation between Political Participation &amp; Internal Efficacy

	<i>Political Participation</i>	<i>Internal Efficacy</i>
Pearson Correlation	1	.373**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	491	491
Pearson Correlation	.373**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	491	491

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (10) shows that there **is a correlation** between the political participation and the internal efficacy since  $\text{sig} = 0.000 < 0.05$  with a **moderate positive** correlation since  $r = 0.373$ .

Table (11) Correlation between Political Participation &amp; External Efficacy

		<i>Political Participation</i>	<i>External Efficacy</i>
Political Participation	Pearson Correlation	1	.141**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	491	491
External Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.141**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	491	491

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (11) shows that there **is a correlation** between the political participation and the external efficacy since  $\text{sig} = 0.002 < 0.05$ . This is a **weak positive** correlation since  $r = 0.141$ .

Thus, we can conclude that the Hypothesis **H3** is accepted and there is an impact of the political efficacy on the citizens' participation in politics, while the internal efficacy has higher influence than the external efficacy on the participation process

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present research is limited by the ability of reaching a bigger set of population from lower educational level since the survey has been submitted online and it was hard for low-educational level people to know how to fill it; only 1.8% of the population size has less than high school. Furthermore, the random population coincidentally has been filled unequally among provinces; for example, only 4% of the population is from Akkar while 34% is from Mount Lebanon, and this has also affected the population distribution among the sectarian sects. Furthermore, the ability to support the research with some deep interviews with voters from different provinces was so difficult as social distance was still like a must, not forgetting the fuel crisis in Lebanon.

### CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to explore the impact of social media political branding on the level of netizens' participation in politics; particularly voting in Lebanon. Furthermore, the present research also targeted to explore the relation of social media political content branding on the netizens' self- efficacy, both external and internal, as well the collective self- efficacy.



To investigate the objectives of the present research, a quantitative method was adopted to analyze the data of the survey questionnaire results.

All the hypotheses of the present study were accepted. Overall, the data reflects a positive view of social media's impact on voters' political participation in Lebanon. Our findings imply that the political influence of social media platforms in developing democracies like Lebanon is similar to that of the matured and mature democracy of the United Kingdom, as explained by Brändle et al (2022). Furthermore, the findings make the effects of social media political branding on the self-external and internal efficacy clear. In addition, the findings of this study are equally beneficial to countries that have a poor democracy or are still working to strengthen their democracy to be aware of the importance of social media in building citizens with higher political efficacy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Practical Recommendations

Established democracies occupy the majority of the published space. As a result, we advocate focusing on less-established democracies and comparing developed and developing democracies using the democracy index (The Economist, 2022) In the specific category of democracy, this will broaden the reach of the communication mediation technique. So, this study is very beneficial to be used by the United nations and the governments themselves for fostering the political internal efficacy of the nations, especially in developing countries and where democracy is abused by the governors and political parties and misunderstood by the citizens. So, social media can function effectively in increasing the netizens' political awareness and participation in voting and increasing the democratic practices as well. On the other hand, recommendations to manage social media political posts contexts and content should not be neglected as it has a significant role in distracting the external political efficacy and lessening netizens' beliefs that they can really influence the political process, especially for young netizens who have little interest in political issues and no reasonable low or high blind trust in the politicians and the political system.

### Future Research Recommendations

Although research on the role of social media in political participation is not a new trend, there is still much room for future academics to delve deeper into the concept of social

media use for political involvement. In terms of theory, this study suggests including partisanship as an antecedent orientation and testing its role as a moderator of social media use, as well as testing its direct influence on response by combining social identity theory with a communication mediation model. Future researchers may be able to build on these ideas to produce more solid theoretical and practical consequences.

Furthermore, on the Lebanese level, and as the election has been done, it is recommended to measure the youth participation in voting and to study their behavior whether they imitated their ancestors' beliefs in choosing the candidates or they have been truly a part in the democratic change which Lebanon has witnessed for the first time in its history after Al-Taef.

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